

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH



COUNTY OF SAN BERNARDINO

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Avian Flu (Bird Flu) Preparedness in San Bernardino County.

San Bernardino, CA – ABC's Original Movie "Fatal Contact: Bird Flu in America" which airs Tuesday night (May 9th at 8:00 pm), is a dramatized version of what could happen if an outbreak of Avian Flu were to mutate into a virus that becomes transmissible between humans. **At this time there is no pandemic flu nor has human-to-human transmissions occurred with H5N1.**

Avian Flu (bird flu) also known as the H5N1 virus, is caused by an influenza virus naturally infecting wild birds. The H5N1 virus is deadly to domestic fowl and can be transmitted to humans who are in close contacts with infected birds. Currently there is no human immunity or vaccine available for the H5N1.

The H5N1 virus was first recognized in Hong Kong during 1997, infecting 18 humans and causing 6 deaths. To prevent others from being infected, 1.5 million birds were destroyed in efforts to eradicate the virus. Since 2003 more than 100 human cases have been reported to the World Health Organization. Globally, planning efforts have been focused on education, surveillance, antiviral medications, vaccine development, health care planning, and public health interventions.

San Bernardino County Department of Public Health is taking steps to be prepared for public health threats such as the Avian Flu. Public Health Director, Jim Felten stated that "the County of San Bernardino Department of Public Health has been proactively educating the public, city governments, and local disaster councils through presentations and postings of information on Avian Flu/ Pandemic Flu to

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the Department of Public Health's website." Federal Homeland Security funding has enabled significant improvements in public health emergency response such as: laboratory equipment to collect and analyze organisms that pose health threats, stockpiles of medicine and vaccines; increased patient capacity for hospitals, protective equipment, and training and exercises with local police, fire, emergency medical services, hospitals, and community groups. Felten noted that "while it is important for the public to know how their government agencies are ready to protect the community during a public health threat, it is just as important for everyone to be personally prepared in the event of an emergency situation."

While Avian Flu or other serious flu viruses may not be an immediate threat in San Bernardino County or the United States, people can lessen the threat of flu infections in the community by practicing these good health habits:

- Wash your hands frequently, especially after using the bathroom and eating,
- Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or cloth and dispose of it in the trash,
- Stay away from others when sick, and
- Stay informed

For more information on Pandemic Flu/Avian Flu please visit the Public Health website at <http://www.sbcounty.gov/publth>. For more information on how you can be better prepared for an emergency visit the Public Health Preparedness and Response website at <http://www.sbcounty.gov/dph/prepandresponse>. The website will also post current news releases pertaining to Public Health emergencies affecting San Bernardino County if an emergency were to occur.

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